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PUBLIC POLICIES IN INFORMATION
DEVELOPED BY THE AAA

Paper presented by Alfred D. Stedman, Assistant Administrator, Agricultural Adjustment Administration, at round table discussion at meeting of American Political Science Association, Columbus, Ohio, December 29, 1938.



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In inviting me to take part in this round table discussion of the subject of public relations activities of governmental agencies, Mr. Harwood L. Childs requested that I prepare a paper dealing with the information work of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration.

It happens that in the forthcoming report of the Administrator of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration for the 18-month period ending July 1, 1938, there is to appear a chapter which discusses this problem. Since I had a good deal to do with the writing of this chapter, and since it covers my thoughts on the subject rather fully and frankly, I have preferred to use it, rather than any less carefully prepared substitute, as a basis for my discussion today. It is needless to say that my use of this chapter in this way has already been approved by Mr. H. R. Tolley, who was the Administrator of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration during the period covered by the report, and also by Mr. R. M. Evans, who has since succeeded him in that capacity. The chapter follows, with a few minor exceptions, in the form in which it will very soon be published in the Administrator's Report.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.
January 10, 1918

THE HONORABLE SENATOR
WASHINGTON, D. C.

Dear Sir: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 7th inst. in relation to the proposed amendment to the Plant Industry Act, and in reply to inform you that the same has been forwarded to the proper authorities for their consideration.

I have also the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 10th inst. in relation to the proposed amendment to the Plant Industry Act, and in reply to inform you that the same has been forwarded to the proper authorities for their consideration.

The proposed amendment to the Plant Industry Act, which was introduced by Senator [Name] on January 10, 1918, is being considered by the Committee on Agriculture, and it is expected that a report will be made to the Senate in due season.

I am, Sir, very respectfully,
Your obedient servant,
[Signature]

Problems of the proper handling of public information have deeply concerned the Agricultural Adjustment Administration since it was first created in 1933. Important questions of policy concerning the functions of a governmental information agency in connection with the operations of a national action program are involved.

As it has gone ahead with its work, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration has become more and more convinced that these questions lie very close to the heart of the broader problem of how democracy can make itself more effective in helping the people meet their economic needs.

Because the agricultural adjustment programs have been a new thing in government, the scope and nature of informational activities have not been charted and much pioneering work on the part of the AAA has been necessary. The problems that have been encountered in carrying out the adjustment programs have been given a great deal of thought inside the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and also have aroused considerable outside discussion. The informational activities of the AAA have been seriously criticized on grounds of propaganda, and some critics have gone so far as to maintain that these activities have no value whatever, but on the contrary are incompatible with and dangerous to democracy. Admittedly there are important and unanswered questions concerning the extent to which it is right for the Government to go in disseminating informational matter which is of a persuasive nature, which advocates a definite course of action and asks citizens to support that course. Such questions are involved because in a democracy

citizens have a fundamental right to oppose, individually or in an organized way, the acts of government, and the institution of a free press is the principal medium through which criticism of government expresses itself. One of the clearest distinctions between the democratic and absolutist forms of government is the existence of freedom of opinion, freedom of utterance, and freedom of the press.

In view of the foregoing, how far can a federal government agency go as a matter of wise and sound public policy, in publicizing favorably its own activities and in seeking widespread public participation in its programs? How does the dissemination of information by such an agency affect the operations of the democratic system?

Those in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration who have special responsibilities in this field have sought to enlighten the public on this as well as other phases of the activities of the AAA.

In this chapter an effort will be made to carry the discussion a good deal further than before on the basis of the experience of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration in this field in the past four years. In the discussions which follow, it will be desirable to have in mind a fairly clear definition of the term "propaganda". For the purposes of this report the term is used in its ordinary sense, that is as meaning material which is persuasive or argumentative and which emphasizes one point of view more or less to the neglect or exclusion of other points of view on a subject which is controversial and on which there are different opinions.

A good many of those who have criticized the informational activities of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration have in reality been doing so on the broader ground that the entire farm program is unnecessary and inadvisable. This broader question is, of course, a proper one for discussion, but for the purposes of this study, it must be observed that the program resulted from popular insistence that the resources of government be used to help agriculture meet its pressing economic problems, so as to protect its income and preserve the precious soil resources of the nation. Twice recently the alternative of having no farm program has, after general public debate, been definitely rejected. One instance was during depression when severe economic consequences for the nation resulted from the effects on industry of farm price declines and losses of farm buying power. The other instance was that of drought occurring in 1934 and 1936, when there seemed to be general agreement that rather than suffer disaster from reliance upon purely individual efforts to combat the drought, the situation called for such a social effort as that represented by the national farm program.

In a nation where more and more people in business, in industry, and in the professions have been deriving the benefits of cooperative effort on an expanding scale, the idea of insisting on a purely individualistic economy for the farmers, and denying them the right to work together in meeting their common problems through a national farm program, apparently has been discarded. A farm program is, in one sense, chiefly organized information about elements in the farmer's problems and an organized way for farmers to meet these problems.

The causes of the great economic disasters from which farmers have suffered in the past can now be fairly well ascertained and the disasters avoided if farmers get the information needed and act upon it. The great farm depressions of the past footed the nation's bill for the high costs of ignorance.

This discussion does not deal with the question of whether or not a national farm program should be carried on. The basis of the discussion is the fact that Congress has by law directed the operation of such a program. Assuming the existence of this program, the questions considered here have to do with the kind of informational effort that should be carried on in connection with it.

Informing the General Public

At the outset it must be borne in mind that the informational problem of the Triple-A consists of two major parts. The first part of the problem is to afford the general public information about the Triple-A programs. The second part of the problem is to inform the farmers who are participating or who are eligible for participation concerning the agricultural programs which are of direct and special interest to them.

The problem of advising the general public about the adjustment program is a large task in itself, aside from the special and more detailed work of providing farmers with the information they want. The Agricultural Adjustment Administration has the same duty that rests upon any governmental agency to supply information about its activities to all inquirers. It shares with other governmental agencies the responsibility

to make a special effort to furnish information in clear, understandable, and concise form to representatives of informational services of every kind.

There are a great many highly efficient means of distributing information of this type to the general public in the United States. They constitute an immense machine which includes daily newspapers, with their great national press associations and special correspondents in Washington, the radio networks and local stations, the weekly press, the national magazines, the farm magazines and newspapers, the trade press, and special publications and services of various kinds. So far as the general public is concerned, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration has sought primarily, not to create new media for spreading information, but to supply information as well as it could, in the form asked for and desired, to the agencies constituting the immensely valuable machine already existing in this country for dissemination of human intelligence. The Agricultural Adjustment Administration has felt that it has a positive responsibility to do this. In fact, this responsibility rests more heavily upon the AAA than upon some other agencies because of the size and number of its operations, the large amounts of money involved, and the fact that these operations have effects upon all parts of the population. The AAA has felt that failure to meet this responsibility would create serious problems for the Department.

The Agricultural Adjustment Administration therefore includes in its administrative organization a Division of Information equipped with a press service, with writers, editors, and other personnel competent to

assemble information and make it available in written and verbal form.

The work of assembling information is paralleled in importance by the work of its distribution, and the personnel includes those whose function is to open and keep open the channels of distribution of information.

Out of the total of 3,100 employees of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration as of July 1, 1938, about 160 were in the Division of Information in all classes of service, including clerical, stenographic, and mechanical workers. Of these, about 30 were engaged in writing or editorial work of various kinds.

Press and Radio Services

Through this Division, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration regularly issues to the press prepared releases making public accounts of its principal operations. A special need to make these releases brief, accurate, and to the point results from the greatly increased burden imposed on Washington correspondents of the daily press by the large increase in the number and scope of governmental activities since 1933. The rapid rate of movement of governmental operations designed to meet quickly changing economic conditions has also created a need for promptness in making announcements public. In carrying on these functions, the AAA has operated with the full cooperation and accord of the long-established and efficient fact-finding and fact-disseminating agencies of the Department.

Besides the press, the radio has proved a valuable medium for providing the public with day-to-day information about the operations of the AAA. Working with the radio service of the Department, the

Agricultural Adjustment Administration has made a special effort to disseminate information to the public through the facilities made available by the radio. In particular, it has broadcast regular reports of its operations to large radio audiences on the Farm and Home Hour. In addition, AAA executives have discussed phases of its programs on special broadcasts arranged for by one or other of the national broadcasting chains at times when public interest in some part of the program was especially alert.

The Agricultural Adjustment Administration has endeavored to follow consistently the practice of affording people accurate information bearing directly upon the questions they ask. The AAA has made it a definite practice to assist newspaper men and other inquirers to go directly to authoritative sources for their information. The informational workers of the Triple-A have as one of their regular functions the making of appointments for newspaper correspondents with the experts, technicians, and executives whenever these inquirers have wanted to get to original sources and dig out information for themselves. Exceptions to this are instances in which the AAA operating people are so burdened with official duties that they can not grant special interviews, and, of course, instances of requests for information bearing merely on personal controversies. The official press releases of the AAA have not been used as a barrier between reporters and the executives and experts who are authentic sources of information. The reporters have been encouraged to go behind the releases to get their own information from the authorities whenever they

wished. The releases have, however, served as authentic announcements. They constitute an accurate official record of administrative acts, with the requisite precision of statement in circumstances where precise statement is necessary. They afford a readily usable form of information for those who do not have time to make independent inquiry. They serve as one minimum commitment that is required of officials even when they are inclined, sometimes with much provocation, to be vague and evasive about developments in the operations in their charge.

The information policy which the Agricultural Adjustment Administration has tried to follow is called an "open" information policy. The AAA has not adhered to this policy without some deviation. There have been occasional departures from it, as for example when the amounts of individual payments, including many large payments, were not made public for reasons which then seemed persuasive. But these lapses have been an exception and on the whole facts have been afforded to all newspapers and publications, without regard to whether their editorial and news policies were favorable to or critical of the adjustment programs.

Within the Agricultural Adjustment Administration there has been a keen appreciation by many executives of the special value of alert and independent news reporting. The readiness of the press to report adversities of the AAA and publish critical expressions of the opinions of prominent people about it has been of much more value than reporting of uniform praise would have been. The occasional suggestions

made in this country that criticism of government should be suppressed seem to the AAA to overlook not only the right but also the function of the opposition in a democracy. That function is to stimulate intelligent care and alertness on the part of the administration. Even the kind of opposition most difficult to tolerate, that based on misstatement or misrepresentation of facts, does not justify so drastic a step as censorship or suppression. If the democratic processes are working, even misrepresentation may set in motion its own correctives and create an interest which makes news out of the truth. AAA experience affords some instances of this. For example, in 1934 a story was widely circulated that the AAA was paying thousands of dollars for reducing hog production to farmers who never had raised any hogs. The tale was repeated so frequently and by persons of so much prominence, including a historian and a United States Senator, that it became a sensation. The situation created an opportunity for the AAA to take advantage of the public interest that had been stirred up and explode the story with a simple statement of the facts. This was done and public attention was focused upon the truth to an extent which otherwise might not have been possible. Another example of the same thing occurred recently when a distinguished newspaper columnist in portraying the AAA aerial survey as mere sky spying gave an opportunity for the Administration to call general attention to the true significance of this historic achievement in the first permanent recording in an aerial map of the farm land resources of this country. Thus in a democracy, a mistaken opposition is often harmless because the results inadvertently achieved are just the opposite of those intended.

The Agricultural Adjustment Administration supplies its executives systematically every day with a photostat report reproducing for them the news that principal newspapers of the country are carrying about its operations. This is one way in which the Adjustment Administration tries to learn promptly whenever serious difficulties in administration of the program develop in the field. It is also one of the ways by which the AAA learns quickly where misinformation about its programs has become current. Thus the press of the country places before the Agricultural Adjustment Administration every day a swift reflection of public reactions to AAA operations. Using these news reports, and supplementing them with the more detailed information that is necessary from the field, the AAA systematically undertakes to correct mistakes in administration whenever instances are disclosed, and in cases of misapprehension of the facts to supply the accurate information needed to clear up the misunderstanding.

In addition to supplying information to the daily press, the AAA has aided in preparation of special articles for magazines and agricultural and trade organs, and has helped representatives of such publications to get access to the material they have requested.

Research Services

While popular attention has tended naturally to focus on the news of day-to-day operations particularly when they were in controversy, the AAA programs also have attracted the deep and objective interest of many writers, observers, and students of economics and government in this and other countries.

This interest has helped to stimulate the Agricultural Adjustment Administration to exercise particular care in the preparation of its official reports. Such reports have been prepared to cover special phases of its activities for the information of the Congress and the public. The best example of these is the annual report of the Administrator, of which this is the most recent.

The Agricultural Adjustment Administration has opened its records to scientists and scientific bodies wishing to make special studies of these operations. The best examples of research carried on in this way are the Brookings Institution's published reports on the AAA programs. The Agricultural Adjustment Administration helped the Brookings Institution to make most careful and searching studies of its operations, giving it free access to AAA data, and opportunity for discussion of the latest thinking on AAA problems by executives. The results of these studies have been published in book form. The Brookings research was accompanied by the freest exchange of opinion between the Brookings Institution and AAA officials. Decision was entirely with the Brookings Institution as to how much weight should be given to AAA opinion, and as to which contentions of the AAA should be partly or wholly accepted and which rejected.

In supplying information to public and private research institutions, the AAA has presented its own interpretations along with the facts, but it has also consistently respected the rights of other

agencies to reach and publish their independent conclusions. It has been recognized that the varying conclusions reached by outside observers were of greater value than if only the opinions of the AAA were reflected. Many inquiries have been received from, and first hand studies have at times been made by, scientific men in other parts of the world, representatives of foreign governments and research workers from public and private institutions in many different fields of research. Some of these inquiries could not be answered but conscientious efforts have been made to supply information whenever possible.

The Triple-A has cooperated closely with the scientific bureaus of the Department, with the State agricultural experiment stations and other research agencies of the State agricultural colleges. Again the Agricultural Adjustment Administration has supplied these Federal and State research agencies, not only with facts but also with its reasoning from and interpretations of the facts. But these explanations have been submitted as part of the proper data for consideration. There never has been any question whatever of the right of any State or Federal research agency to reach its own conclusions and to publish its findings without any regard to whether or not they were favorable to the Triple-A.

Public Information and Propaganda

The charge of propaganda is not usually brought with much force against the foregoing information work of the AAA. Of course, observers, whether they are representatives of newspapers or of research institutions, understand that it is natural for any agency, public or private,

to put its best foot forward in writing or talking about itself. It is not only a natural and human thing to do, but within limits it is also sensible, since the written record of accomplishment affords an important incentive to good administration. However, due allowances have to be made for the usual tendency toward self praise and also for the fact that making public announcements of the Triple-A meet all the requirements cited in this chapter is an aim but unfortunately not always an actual accomplishment. Nevertheless it is true that within the field of AAA operations, the usual announcements, releases and reports put out by the AAA are to some extent comparable in objectivity to the announcements of the scientific and administrative bureaus of the Department -- the reports of supplies and prices, the estimates of production, reports of marketings, and the announcements of results of research and the recommendations of Federal and State agencies for changes in farm and home practices.

While no doubt press releases tend to be couched in terms shedding favorable light on operations of the agency issuing them, nevertheless efforts are consistently made by the AAA to see to it that they do not omit mention of essential details which have the contrary effect. This frankness is, to be sure, partly due to deliberate judgment that this method involves the least difficulty in the long run. Purely from the standpoint of the day-to-day impression which the public has, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration usually works on the assumption that news about mistakes in operations is least damaging when promptly announced

and candidly faced. The AAA opinion is that secretiveness and concealment defeat their purpose and magnify interest in such errors out of proportion to their actual importance. As an example, it is a fact that while the Adjustment Administration declined to disclose its largest payments, the clamor about these payments became so loud as to dwarf public interest in other phases of the Triple-A operations. But once these payments were announced, the clamor ended.

This discussion has now touched upon the general informational activities of the AAA as they relate to supplying information through formal reports and releases to representatives of the public press, periodicals, and research institutions. It has been seen that accusations of propaganda are not very seriously brought against any of these activities. There is, however, another category which is of a more persuasive character than either the press releases or the formal reports, but which like the foregoing are only rarely criticized on the grounds of being propaganda. These are the speeches, letters, and public statements of the executives, including the Secretary of Agriculture when he is discussing the AAA farm program, and the Administrator of the AAA.

These speeches and statements are recognized by everyone as being expressions of policy. They contain not only factual material, but also interpretations of the facts, and analyses of national and worldwide situations affecting agriculture. They represent the thinking of the speaker formed by him after consideration of information available to him through the operations of the entire Administration. While made by

a single executive, they represent in part the composite judgment of the Administration. They contain personal and official philosophy, argument, defense, and also at times, viewpoints attacking or disputing the reasoning or citations of facts by critics.

Nevertheless while they are clearly persuasive, that is almost never taken as grounds for criticism of these expressions of policy. It is considered to be wise and useful that all of the various elements that go to shape important public policies should be discussed in their relationships to each other. About the only way this can be done is in a speech or a letter or a radio utterance. These speeches and statements make no pretense of being mere announcements of objective and unrelated facts. They usually represent an effort to describe all the main facts and conditions which have led the Government to operate as it is operating. Such statements are in the nature of an accounting by the executives of the Administration to the general public and to the farmers to whom these executives are responsible. They frequently constitute the most enlightening expressions about the program that are available to the public. Occasionally they prove to have pronounced effects upon the development of the farm program. It may be that in the future some of them may come to be regarded as having made lasting contributions to the history of agriculture.

Informing the Farmers

The second main phase of the informational problem of the Triple-A has to do with informing farmers about the AAA farm programs, and with encouraging them to participate in these programs. In respect to both the adjustment and marketing agreement programs, this work supplements

the administrative process in a way so important that without it the programs could not operate. The process of getting information on marketing agreements into the hands of farmers is still new, has large opportunities for improvement, and is being improved steadily. As to the adjustment programs, the methods are longer established and better understood, and the AAA county and community committees play a vital part in them. These committeemen perform a service of communication to agriculture that is unique and invaluable. When a new program is being launched, the committeemen talk it over in regional conferences with State committeemen, extension workers, and representatives of the AAA. The county and community committeemen then carry this information to the farmers themselves in local meetings all over the country. Printed bulletins, pamphlets and leaflets, some of a popular and some of a technical nature, are used but primarily the educational process is carried out through personal discussion in the meetings, and the printed materials are of value principally in providing the basis of these discussions and supplying references for use in them.

Cooperation with the Extension Services

In general, the work of informing farmers about current programs is the field in which AAA methods are sometimes referred to as involving the use of "propaganda". It is therefore the field in which the problem arises of the extent to which in a democracy these methods are proper and wise. Before launching into a discussion of this problem, however, it is essential to recognize that an important distinction exists

between two types of informational effort. One type is that with which the AAA is primarily concerned each year in operating the current farm program, in informing farmers about that program, and in encouraging their participation in it. The other is the long-time, fundamental educational work which is carried on by government agencies among farmers, and which seeks to increase their general knowledge of the sciences of plant and animal production and of basic economic conditions which affect agriculture.

This latter type of broad educational activity among farmers has been carried on for many years by the established bureaus of the Department, by the State Colleges of Agriculture, and the Extension Service.

Naturally a development in agricultural policy so important as the appearance of the adjustment programs has had marked effects upon this long-time educational work. Temporarily, at different times in different States or regions, the adjustment programs have disturbed long existing State and federal relations in the field of education. But with experience and better understanding of the nature of the new problems, these difficulties have been surmounted.

Carrying on the fundamental educational work of the Department of Agriculture has been and continues to be a function of the Extension Service, cooperating with the extension services of the several States. It is true that some general educational activities have been carried on by the AAA. The AAA has and will continue to have a deep interest in these activities; and, although the field is recognized as being chiefly that of the Extension Service, the AAA does what it can to assist and supplement it.

The Triple-A programs have had marked effects upon the basic educational work of the Extension Service. They have increased enormously the need for and interest in fundamental education in the economics of agriculture and industry, the sciences of production, farm management and soils, the relationships between producer and consumer welfare, etc. The AAA programs have given a tremendous and healthy stimulus to all the work of the Department in this broad field. The programs have afforded farmers a systematic means to put to immediate and practical use the knowledge of good farming methods and of economic problems which, over the years, the educational efforts of the State and Federal Extension Services have been steadily making available to them. This basic educational work of the Extension Services is useful to farmers whether they take part in the AAA programs or not.

The Triple-A has, however, had other effects on the work of Extension. For a time, in a good many States, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration had to rely largely on the State Extension Service for actual administration of the program in the State. This naturally tended to alter the principal function of Extension, and to cause personnel and resources greatly needed for basic educational work to be focused upon administrative duties. This situation in the States has, however, been relieved as the State and county committees of farmers have been able more and more to assume the burdens of local administration.

The Extension Service has also been affected in another way, as the AAA has sought for its cooperation in the field of the other type of information -- that is, the work of informing farmers about the current program and of encouraging their participation. The State Extension Services, with their county agents in every county -- many of them chosen by farmers to serve as secretaries of the county AAA associations -- have been of great help in this field. However, the director of the State Extension Service is primarily responsible to the State college and not to the Secretary of Agriculture, and as a State agency the State Extension Service determines for itself the extent to which it will or will not carry on this type of informational work on current AAA programs. In carrying on this essential process of communication with farmers about the current program and encouraging them to take part in it, the practice of the AAA is to welcome the fullest cooperation from the State colleges and Extension Services that is possible, recognizing frankly, however, that any State has the unquestionable prerogative of leaving part or all of this kind of informational activity to the farmers' committees and the AAA administrative personnel. Although the work of informing farmers about current programs has been improved considerably, one of the greatest problems still confronting the AAA is that of supplying correct information about and understanding of the programs among the millions of farmers in the United States. The AAA needs to improve a great deal its educational work on current programs and greatly needs all the help the Extension

Service can give. One thing which can be done by the AAA is to give better service in the States and provide more cooperation with State Extension Services. The AAA State offices can take steps to assure that more adequate information regularly reaches the county and community committeemen and the farmers. It is essential to administration of the program that the AAA committeemen be promptly and effectively supplied with adequate information about the program.

Farmer Information and Propaganda

With the distinction clear between basic educational work of the State and Federal agricultural agencies, and the current informational work of AAA in its annual programs, a discussion of this latter kind of effort, to which the term "propaganda" has sometimes been applied, can be undertaken.

The operation of AAA programs depends on the individual decisions of large numbers of farmers. Obviously the decision of individual producers determines whether they will participate in the program or remain outside. The way in which each individual makes up his mind depends at least in part upon the adequacy of his information about the program and about the way in which it will affect him. In order to be in a position to choose intelligently a farmer needs to know the facts about the program as it applies to his farm. And he has an unquestionable right to be given these facts. This right was recognized especially by Congress very early in the life of the AAA. This specific recognition of the right of farmers to

have adequate information was given by amending the National Recovery Act in 1933 to include the following:

"Notwithstanding any provisions of existing laws, the Secretary of Agriculture may in the administration of the Agricultural Adjustment Act make public such information as he deems necessary in order to effectuate the purpose of such act."

The administrators of the adjustment programs have a clear duty to supply the essential information regarding their operations so far as they can do so. This responsibility of the AAA extends to farmers who do not participate as well as to participants. The administrators would be failing in that duty if they neglected to supply the farmers with this information.

The Background of Unbiased Inquiry

Information about the current Triple-A programs goes through two distinct phases. During the first phase, the attitude of the AAA is one of inquiry, and is therefore relatively objective and unbiased. In the second phase, however, the AAA is not neutral but engages in positive support of a program. The first phase is the period of program-making, and the second is the period of program operation. The work of the AAA in providing farmers with information about the program as a basis for their decision on the question of participation begins when the program-making phase is ended.

In the first phase, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration gathers all the essential information that it can get from the several important sources that are available. One source is the farmers themselves. Their recommendations as to the kind of program

they want are worked out through the county planning committees and are considered along with other data. The AAA seeks to make sure that its new program is well grounded on the facts. Therefore a large part of program planning consists in gathering the necessary data. These data are assembled from research agencies of the Department and of the State Colleges of Agriculture and Agricultural Experiment Stations. The AAA relies heavily upon the Bureau of Agricultural Economics to provide the pertinent facts about supplies, plantings, prospective yields, and the outlook for new markets here and abroad. The Administration also, in this fact-finding period of program making, draws upon the expert knowledge of the Soil Conservation Service, the Bureaus of Plant and Animal Industry, the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils, and other bureaus to afford advice as to the extent of soil destruction and as to up-to-date methods of protecting soil against wind and water erosion. It draws likewise upon the information in possession of the scientific bureaus as to regional and local adaptabilities, opportunities for improvements in farm management, and chances to develop the farming industry in such a way as to meet the health needs and dietary requirements of all the people. This work of the established research agencies in obtaining this information is purely scientific and objective, and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration endeavors, in collating the facts and formulating them into a program, to exercise scientific deliberation and discrimination of judgment.

Building a program requires careful analysis by technicians of the data that have been assembled from all sources. It requires reasoning from the facts. It requires the exercise of forethought as to future developments. It requires accommodation of the national program to the needs of different localities and regions. While a program is in the formative stage, there is a great deal of discussion pro and con of the proposed provisions. Many provisions are modified or rejected entirely after weaknesses are revealed by such debate. This is the period of free exchange of opinion within the AAA, of weighing of advantages against disadvantages, of doubt and decision.

The Elements of Persuasion

When the program has finally been worked out and agreed upon, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration then must face the fact that the success of it depends very largely upon the degree to which farmers accept it and participate in it. By the time the program is completed, it presents the best composite judgment of the AAA as to what a program worked out within the terms of the law should contain in order to serve most effectively the interests of the farmers and the general welfare.

Having reached such a judgment, the AAA is impelled by various factors to present the program fully and effectively to the farmers, and in so doing to place emphasis upon its advantages to them. For one thing, the AAA would not be honest or candid to pretend a neutral attitude toward its own program. Moreover, the AAA knows that no matter

how good a program is it will be relatively useless, unless large numbers of farmers understand what the program is and take part in it. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for a new program to be subjected immediately to sharp attack, sometimes led by forces having a selfish financial interest in causing it to fail. These attacks may involve serious and systematic misrepresentation of facts, resulting in demands from farmers and others for accurate information.

So this phase of the Triple-A program work is the phase of communicating to farmers information about the program. This involves primarily an explanation to them of what the main provisions of the program are, and how farmers may carry them out on their own farms. The acquainting of farmers with the nature of the program is carried on, as has been said, largely through the State, county, and community committees of farmers which administer the program. Informing the county and community committees about the program is a vital step in the whole process and it is essential that channels of information to these committees be kept open. The work of informing the committees paves the way for the program discussion meetings that are held later with the farmers generally in each community. These meetings can not be successful unless the committeemen first are adequately informed. The written and spoken statements distributed to AAA committeemen and farmers are such as to arouse a favorable response on the part of farmers and encourage them to take part

in the plan. Under a definition of "propaganda" as broad as that given at the beginning of this chapter, published matter distributed to farmers describing the programs would in some instances at least, be considered to fall within the meaning of that term, even though the information scrupulously undertakes not to misrepresent any facts to any one. It is propaganda in the sense that the AAA with full respect for the facts, still gives the farmers an extensive presentation of one course of action as being more desirable than others. The process involves picking and choosing as between sets of facts, placing more emphasis upon some than upon others according to a judgment of their relative importance. Thus it does involve a departure from the objective attitude. It involves active support of a positive plan of cooperative action which is intended to improve the economic condition of agriculture.

The Function of Information in a Democracy

It is hoped that the nature of the information problem in the actual operation of an action program in a democracy has become fairly apparent from the foregoing discussion. The question is: Can such informational efforts be carried on constructively in our country or are they in some way inimical to democracy? Does the action program, and the use of persuasive information methods in carrying it out involve danger to freedom of the press and free speech? Such a danger would mean that democracy itself was endangered.

But democracy itself--the majority of the people--has insisted that the Government take action to help the people meet their pressing problems. The people have shown that they will not tolerate inaction on the part of the Government when distress could readily be relieved by cooperative programs carried on with Government help. In fact, democracy seemed most in danger when Government refused to take action to meet these problems. When it did act positively, the danger to democracy seemed to recede.

When action programs are demanded of the Government it becomes essential to inform the people about these programs. Informed public opinion is the basis of democracy. Adequate information is all that stands between democracy and the complete inefficiency and ineffectiveness which hitherto have paralyzed the people during a depression. The effort to inform 6,000,000 farmers about the outstanding facts of their economic problems, and to give them and the general public an understanding of these problems and of the program that has been worked out to meet them is perhaps one of the largest and most difficult educational undertakings in the history of democracy. To be most useful, this informational undertaking must be tied to a program which is itself in the public interest. The educational effort must be truthful and factual in character and not a mere campaign of ballyhoo and bunkum. It must not be high pressure promotion. It must not depend on the shallow and artful tricks of publicity. It must not rely on stirring dangerous fires of fear or hate. A national farm

program must have too deep and enduring usefulness to the nation to be achieved by the trickery that peddles cheap nothings to unwilling customers, or that merely wins petty political triumphs which while seemingly brilliant one day are gone the next, or that furthers the sinister ends of powerful and selfish interests. The purposes of government must be firmly grounded in the lasting welfare of all the people, and the methods used should have worth and integrity great enough to match these ends.

Democratic Safeguards Against Propaganda

A program such as that of the AAA must contain in itself adequate safeguards against violations of these ends. First of all, the program must meet one vital qualification: it must serve the interests of the general public as well as the farm group.

As an assurance that the program is in the national interest as well as the interest of the farm group, the authority for operation of the program rests upon the approval by the national legislature representing all shades of public opinion and all groups of the people.

A second assurance is the readiness of administrators on their part to require that the program shall be of such a nature as to serve the national welfare as well as the farmers as a group. This responsibility of the farm program to the whole people has been recognized over and over again by the Secretary of Agriculture and by the administrators of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. One of their principal tasks, therefore, from the point of view of both economic and political

science, and one of the principal concerns of those especially interested in the AAA's public relations problems, has been to seek out the points where the interests of the farmers coincide with the interests of the general public and to build the program upon these key points as a foundation.

A further safeguard to democracy in carrying out an action program is that the program itself shall be of a democratic nature. The AAA adjustment program is carried on by nearly 4,000,000 farmers and the AAA marketing agreements on their part affect possibly 1,500,000. In respect to operation of marketing agreements, the farmers through special committees have a large voice, and the farmers have a large part in running the adjustment program through the county and community committees of farmers, which they themselves elect. This is a democratic form of organization comparable in some degree to the old town meeting method of discussing and deciding public questions. The farmers themselves are as a group very independent in spirit and action. The picture of them so often painted by opponents of the farm program as being submissive persons looking for somebody to tell them what to think and do is a fiction. The farmers are not that kind of people. They do not take orders from anybody. But even if they were not independent minded and there were a real danger of "regimentation", the committee form of farmer organization would be a strong protection of democracy. Further protection of the same kind is the requirement that when an emergency program includes close controls or regimentation, the methods must be conditioned upon a favorable vote of a

large majority (two-thirds majority) of those farmers voting in a referendum.

Still another safeguard is the existence of strict regulations to assure that the programs are carried out on a non-partisan and non-political basis. This means that all payments to farmers must be made in a fair, impartial, and impersonal way and on an absolutely non-partisan basis, that no payment under any circumstances can be made to an individual on any grounds of political influence or identification with party or party leadership.

It is required also that the farmers' committees must be prohibited from official participation in political campaigns. This is the reason why the articles of association of the farmers' county associations contain the following among their regulations:

"The tenure of office of any committeeman, delegate, officer, or employee shall be automatically terminated and a vacancy shall exist when such person becomes such a candidate or accepts such a political position.

"The office, clerical, mailing, or other facilities of the Association shall not be used for political purposes, nor shall any such facility be used in any way to support, assist, or oppose any political candidate or party or for any other purpose than these set forth in Article II."

Most vital of all, however, is the requirement that the action programs do not interfere in the slightest degree with freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly. Opponents of the program must be free to criticize; they must have the liberty to present organized opposition. They must have the freedom to find fault with the Government's operations and to express their opposi-

tion. They must have access to the radio, to the press, and to the public forums. The requirement is that non-governmental agencies as well as Government shall have opportunity to express themselves to the people.

If these key institutions of democracy continue to function, if the Government does not try to undermine them but cherishes their value and strives to build them stronger, then it appears that democracy is not endangered by a program of action -- even if that program is carried out in part through the dissemination of information which is of a persuasive nature.

It is too much to expect all the rules of democracy to be adhered to at all times without any mistakes or failures. But nothing is more certain than that democracy has effective ways of punishment for grave and persistent infractions, just as it has effective rewards for important service well done. The degree to which the rules are observed is the best measurement of good administration.

Democracy depends more than any other system of society upon the information and intelligence of the people. The reason for the existence of an action program such as the AAA is to help the people make democracy work. The purpose of the informational activities that have been described in the foregoing pages is to supply farmers and non-farmers with information about the program, the reasons for it, and the details of its operations. When these informational activities are examined in the light of the facts and the human needs of the people, they seem to have a legitimate and vital place in democracy.

